

# SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCE

## ON-SITE REVIEW REPORT

---

***Clay County***

January 2023

---



Office of Support &  
Accountability



**West Virginia Board of Education  
2022-2023**

**L. Paul Hardesty**, President  
**Nancy J. White**, Vice President  
**F. Scott Rotruck**, Financial Officer

**Robert W. Dunlevy**, Member  
**Victor L. Gabriel**, Member  
**Daniel D. Snavelly, M.D.**, Member  
**Christopher A. Stansbury, O.D.**, Member  
**Debra K. Sullivan**, Member  
**James S. Wilson, D.D.S.**, Member

**Sarah Armstrong Tucker, Ph.D.**, Ex Officio  
Chancellor  
West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission  
West Virginia Council for Community and Technical College Education

**David L. Roach**, Ex Officio  
State Superintendent of Schools  
West Virginia Department of Education

# Table of Contents

Introduction.....2

Onsite Review Team Members.....2

Background .....3

Focus Area 1: Central Office and Local Board of Education Leadership .....5

Focus Area 2: Principal Leadership..... 9

Focus Area 3: School Improvement Processes and Instruction ..... 11

Focus Area 4: Financial Indicators and Purchasing Procedures .....13

Focus Area 5: Operation of Federal Programs ..... 14

# Introduction

At the specific request of the West Virginia State Superintendent of Schools, the Office of Support and Accountability conducted a Special Circumstance Review of Clay County Schools, beginning November 30, 2022, to investigate recent Clay County Board of Education actions, complaints submitted to the West Virginia Department of Education (WVDE), and student performance as indicated by the West Virginia Balanced Scorecard. The WVDE conducted the onsite review and managed the process according to the unique circumstances, W. Va. Code §18-2E-5, and *WVBE Policy 2322: West Virginia System of Support and Accountability*.

The following areas were reviewed: central office and local board of education leadership; principal leadership; school improvement processes; financial indicators and purchasing procedures; and the operation of federal programs. Additionally, the Team conducted classroom observations in each school to inform instructional recommendations and support.

## Onsite Review Team Members

Jonah Adkins, Coordinator, Office of Accountability, WVDE  
Charlene Coburn, Accountability Officer, Office of Support and Accountability, WVDE  
Alexandra Criner, Coordinator, Office of Accountability, WVDE  
Matthew Hicks, Director, Office of Accountability, WVDE  
Stacey Losh, Coordinator, Office of School Improvement, WVDE  
Dr. Stacey Murrell, Coordinator, Office of Accountability, WVDE  
Kerri Templeton, Coordinator, Office of Leadership Development and Support, WVDE

# Background

Clay County Schools consists of four elementary, one middle, and one high school serving approximately 1,614 students. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate county proficiency data for English language arts and mathematics for school years 2010-2022. Proficiency data is not available for SY 2019-2020 due to the COVID-19 National Emergency.

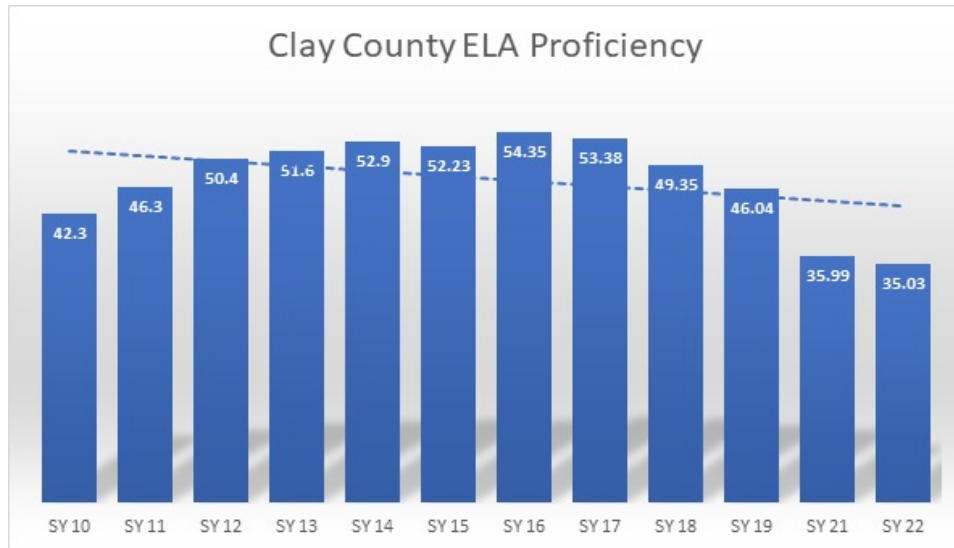


Figure 1

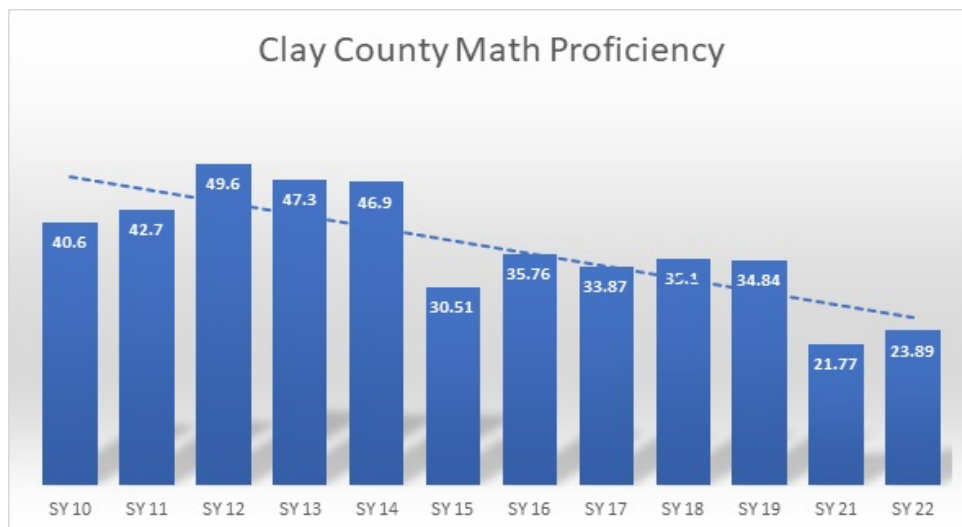


Figure 2

The Clay County Board of Education scheduled a special meeting on November 2, 2022, with the stated purpose to showcase an electric school bus pilot program. Two days prior to the scheduled meeting, the agenda was amended to read “discussion and possible action regarding the superintendent’s contract and possibly abbreviating the superintendent’s term in office.” After a nearly two-hour executive session, a motion was made to accept the mutual terms of the termination of the contract with the former superintendent. At the time of the Special Circumstance Review, an interim superintendent had been in that role for three weeks.

On November 8, 2022, Clay County Schools' Excess Levy was defeated by voters for a second time. The levy initially failed on January 29, 2022. The excess levy had been in place for nearly 25 years and provided \$531,573 annually to fund the following: repair, maintenance, and operation of school buildings and equipment; the purchase of textbooks, library books, and instructional supplies and equipment; payment of utilities for all schools; student transportation, including activity buses; extra-curricular activities, including athletics, music, drama, 4-H, field trips, student clubs, and the continued operation of H.E. White and Lizemore Elementary Schools.

The chart below depicts the general revenue fund balance from 2013-2022.

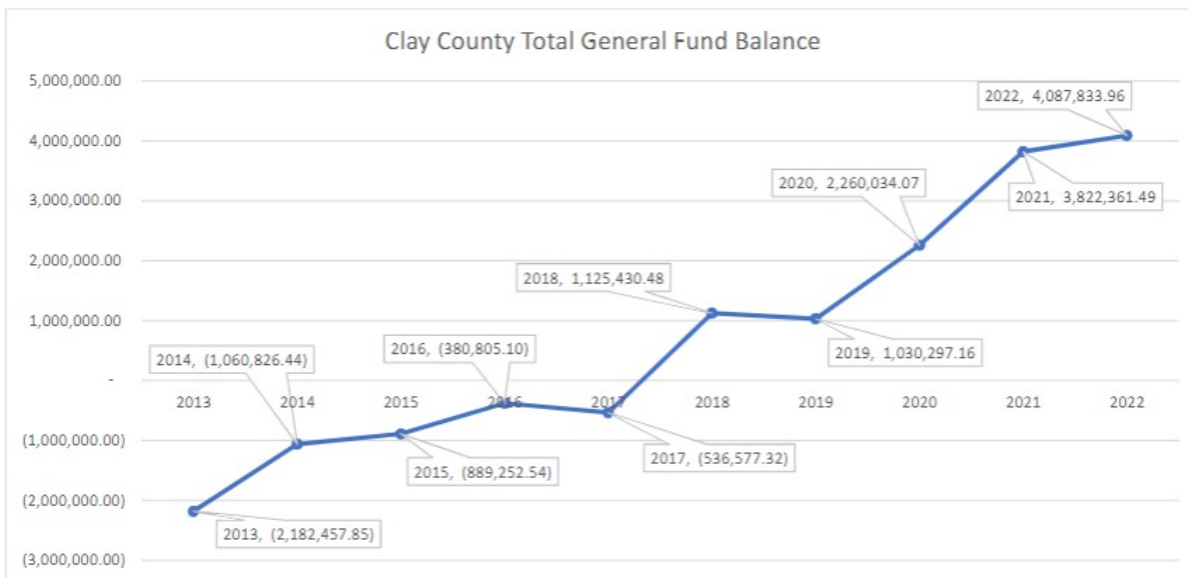


Figure 3

Student enrollment in Clay County Schools has shown a steady decrease since SY 2018. Figure 4 illustrates the total enrollment for each school year within this period.

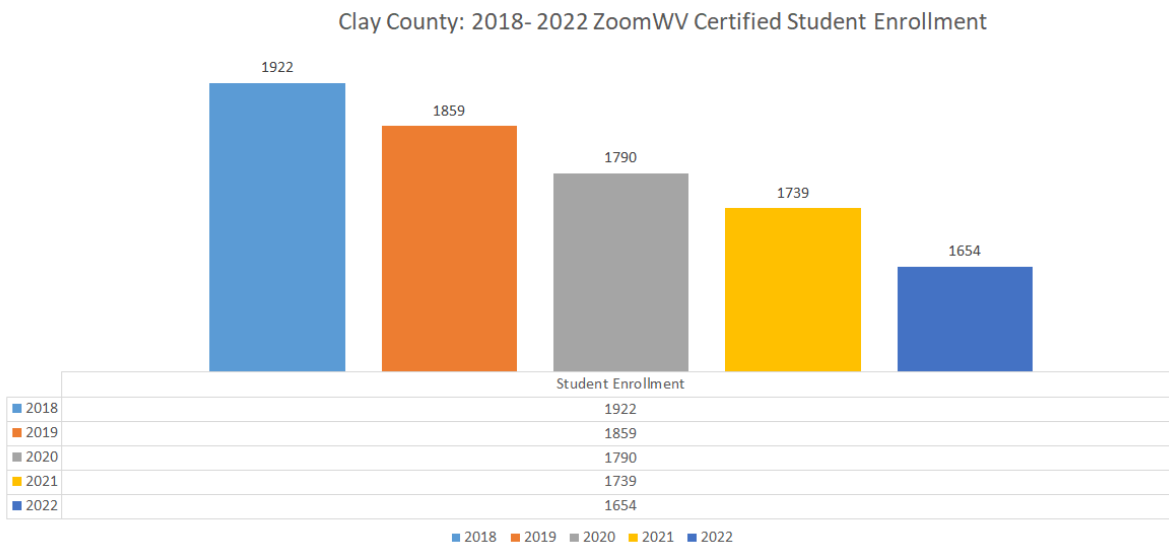


Figure 4

# Focus Area 1: Central Office and Local Board of Education Leadership

During the Review, the Team interviewed members of the central office staff, the county board of education members, all principals, and the majority of teachers in each school building. Additionally, the leadership of the central office and county board of education was discussed during interviews conducted with school-based personnel. The following information and resulting recommendations were developed based on classroom observations and the consistency of responses throughout these interviews.

## Central Office Leadership

- *Based on interviews, a professional and collegial work environment exists within the central office. Recently improved communication and effective conflict resolution were described as contributing to this environment. Collaboration and support among staff members were evident.*
- *Team interactions with central office staff indicated there were several highly qualified and experienced leaders within the central office. The Team concluded, based on the information provided, the expertise of central office staff members may not have been fully utilized by previous leaders.*
- *Interview comments indicated the process of evaluating central office staff has not consistently occurred per WVBE Policy 5310: Performance Evaluation of School Personnel, and W. Va. Code §18A-2-12.*
- *Central office staff members recalled being directed by the former superintendent to “write something up” concerning their performance goals. Another central office staff member described being asked by the former superintendent to sign a packet of recently-created performance evaluations spanning multiple years. Evaluation completion reports for the current school year demonstrate the timelines for the first two components of the evaluation system – goal-setting and self-reflection – were met for principals.*
- *Evaluation completion reports generated by WVDE staff indicated the former superintendent evaluated his spouse, who is employed by the district as an elementary principal. The West Virginia Governmental Ethics Act (W. Va. Code §6B-3-11) states a public official or public employee may not directly supervise a relative or person with whom he or she resides. This prohibition includes reviewing, auditing, or evaluating work or taking part in discussions or making recommendations concerning employment.*
- *The interim superintendent described efforts to strengthen the instructional focus of the district. This included establishing regular meetings with central office staff and principals and frequent data talks. These practices had occurred on a limited and sporadic basis in prior years.*
- *Most principals expressed currently feeling supported by central office leadership and expressed appreciation of central office staff being present in the schools during recent weeks. Several interviewees mentioned in the past, administrators at the central office were not as visible in schools. The increased presence of central office staff within schools was also mentioned by both the interim superintendent and central office staff. The interim superintendent has given the central office staff the directive to be visible in the schools at least once a week to support principals. A walkthrough form is being created to facilitate data collection during these visits.*

- *The interim superintendent communicated a vision that central office staff will provide a more hands-on and supportive approach to instructional leadership. The interim superintendent expressed a desire to support the role of the principals as instructional leaders rather than focusing primarily on building management. At the time of the review, the interim superintendent's vision has not become actionable. Time is needed to determine this vision's effectiveness and its impact on student achievement. Some central office staff stated directors' efforts to address student achievement and principal leadership were blocked by previous leadership in order to protect principal morale.*
- *Eighty-five percent of teachers provided a complimentary response when discussing support provided to schools by central office staff. Most teachers stated they are provided adequate resources and funding to support their students. However, when questioned about the district's instructional expectations, little information was provided. Additionally, the Team did not observe consistent and pervasive instructional expectations.*

**NONCOMPLIANCE 1.1:** The evaluation process of central office staff did not occur per WVBE Policy 5310: Performance Evaluation of School Personnel, and W. Va. Code §18A-2-12.

**CORRECTIVE ACTION 1.1:** Collaborate with the WVDE Office of Leadership Support to provide technical assistance and support for conducting performance evaluations per WVBE Policy and W. Va. Code. Establish and monitor protocols to ensure employees do not supervise or evaluate family members.

**FINDING 1.1:** The current central office structure tasks one staff member with providing support for curriculum and instruction for grades PK-12, in addition to other central office responsibilities. While it is not uncommon for central office personnel to have responsibilities spanning multiple areas, the current configuration may not represent the most effective use of the expertise available at the central office.

**RECOMMENDATION 1.1:** Consider the roles of all central office staff; taking into consideration the school improvement and leadership experience of each individual and determine if all staff members are being utilized to full capacity regarding school improvement overall and specific leadership and instructional supports for each programmatic level.

**NONCOMPLIANCE 1.2** Through observations and interviews it was evident to the Team that central office staff did not ensure schools were providing instruction to the rigor and depth the West Virginia College and Career Readiness Standards require. *WVBE Policy 2510, Section 2.4*

**CORRECTIVE ACTION 1.2:** Collaborate with the WVDE Office of Teaching and Learning to provide professional development designed to increase teacher and principal knowledge of the WVCCRS. Ensure an understanding of the vertical design of the standards in addition to the content and actionable requirement of individual standards. The principal and School Leadership Team also create a process to monitor the implementation of standards-based instruction.

**FINDING 1.2:** The Team determined the current professional learning and collaboration offered to principals limited opportunities to build capacity and refine professional practice.



**RECOMMENDATION 1.2:** Revise the professional learning opportunities to provide high-quality, collaborative learning experiences to support instructional leadership and continuous improvement. Align professional learning goals to principal evaluation goals and the district-wide instructional program. Provide opportunities for principals to network.

**FINDING 1.3:** Evidence did not support a clear, district-wide instructional focus. While general goals such as “increasing instructional leadership” and “making gains in reading and math” were articulated during interviews, the stated goals are not supported by specific action steps, strategies, and targets to present a unified approach.

**RECOMMENDATION 1.3:** Collaborate with the WVDE Office of Support and Accountability to adopt a comprehensive, district-wide school improvement approach based on the WV Standards for Effective Schools. Once this is established, communicate the process with all building-level administrators to directly align the improvement efforts at each schools’ specific needs. Utilize instructional walkthrough forms, collecting data to inform instructional feedback and support specific school and district-wide goals.

### **Local Board of Education Leadership**

- *Without exception, all county board of education members expressed a desire to help the children of Clay County succeed as their primary motivation to become board members.*
- *Throughout board member interviews, building effective communication methods and developing strong working relationships between the two veteran and three recently-elected members was discussed as a challenge for the board. Differing perceptions exist among members regarding whether or not communication has been efficient, effective, and in alignment with the expectations for transparency and conducting the board’s business publicly.*
- *The recently established practice of publicly streaming board meetings was cited during interviews as a positive step towards keeping the public informed and involved in the business of the board. Interview comments indicated discussions have occurred considering sharing the video stream across additional media platforms to increase accessibility.*
- *On November 8, 2022, Clay County Schools’ Excess Levy failed for the second time. Board member interviews yielded different rationales as to the reason for this failure. Some board members attributed the failure of the levy to the poor public perception of previous decisions made by the local board. Others interpreted the levy failure resulted from a lack of public trust, citing there is a public perception federal funding made available to the district following the COVID-19 National Emergency had been poorly managed. Some respondents described receiving negative feedback from community members who felt the levy did not directly benefit students. Most board members anticipated adjustments to the district operating budget would be necessary to account for the lack of levy funding.*
- *Due to recent board activity, the Team inquired as to the purpose and frequency of executive sessions during board meetings. Board members’ responses revealed executive sessions had been utilized to discuss personnel and student issues in the past, and usually had not taken longer than approximately twenty minutes.*

- *As a stated focus area for this review was to obtain information regarding the decision to end the former superintendent's contract, the Team interviewed board members regarding the circumstances of the November 2, 2022 meeting during which the decision was made. The original purpose of the special meeting scheduled for this date was to showcase an electric school bus pilot program. Before the meeting, the board's vice president hand-delivered to the superintendent a letter requesting an addendum to the meeting agenda. This agenda item read, "discussion and possible board action regarding the Superintendent's contract and possibly abbreviating his term in office." Some board members expressed having no prior knowledge the discussion would occur. However, additional interviews indicated the members were attempting to avoid violations of the West Virginia Open Governmental Proceedings Act. The board voted to enter executive session at 6:24 p.m. and reconvened into special session at 8:18 p.m. At that time, a motion to accept the mutual terms of the termination of the contract with the superintendent was unanimously approved. Board members characterized some confusion and indecision among members regarding the terms of the agreement prolonged the executive session. On November 4, 2022, the local board held an emergency meeting to name an interim superintendent.*
- *The agenda for the next regular meeting of the board, scheduled for November 15, 2022, included an item stating, "Action to clarify certain terms of the Board's action on November 2, 2022, by which it accepted the resignation of Mr. Joe Paxton." Minutes from this meeting reflect an executive session was convened at 6:18 p.m., the announced purpose of which was to "clarify certain terms of the Board's action on November 2, 2022, by which it accepted the mutually-agreed-upon termination of Mr. Joe Paxton's Superintendent Contract." The regular session was reconvened at 8:45 p.m., at which time the board voted unanimously to table the action to clarify the terms. At the next regularly scheduled board meeting, held November 28, 2022, the board once again convened an executive session to discuss the terms of the agreement with the former superintendent. This executive session was convened at 6:13 p.m., and the board returned to regular session at 8:59 pm. One board member read aloud a clarifying statement, recorded verbatim in the minutes from that meeting. The amended terms of the agreement were approved by the board in a 3-2 vote.*
- *Based on interview comments and a review of the district webpage, the Team determined some Clay County Board of Education policies require review and revision. Many of the policies published on the district website were outdated and/or incomplete.*
- *Multiple central office staff described the three recently elected members of the board of education's desire to make informed decisions has led to an increase in communication between the board members and central office staff. The interim superintendent stated the board has asked for more information, especially concerning the district's finances, but has not overstepped into managing the day-to-day operations.*
- *The interim superintendent received two directives from the board: to work with principals on instructional leadership and to balance the district's budget. The interim superintendent additionally expressed a strong alignment exists between the board's vision and that of the central office staff. Several board members mentioned increasing student achievement is the primary focus of the board.*

**FINDING 1.4:** Effective protocols for board member communication and a clear understanding of local board of education authority were not consistently evident to the Team based on information collected during the Review. Due to a majority of the board being recently elected, further consideration of the impact of decision making may be necessary.

**RECOMMENDATION 1.4:** Collaborate with the West Virginia School Board Association to receive training clarifying the role and authority of board members when conducting executive sessions and decision making. Additionally, work with the association to establish effective board communication aligning with the West Virginia Open Governmental Proceedings Act. Additionally, ensure participation from all board members and the interim superintendent.

**FINDING 1.5:** The Clay County Board of Education policy manual available online is not sufficiently updated to determine its accuracy and compliance with current state and federal laws and policies. The policy manual consists of a webpage with hyperlinks to policy documents; however, there are policies listed that do not have documents linked to them. Additionally, the dates on the policies range from the 1970s to the 2000s which would suggest that the policy manual has not been reviewed and updated to align with WVBE Policy, W. Va. Code, and current educational best practices.

**RECOMMENDATION 1.5:** Clay County Schools conduct a comprehensive review and revision to ensure all board policies align with WVBE Policy, W. Va. Code, and current educational best practices. Ensuring board policies are communicated with the public in a comprehensive and user-friendly format may support increased transparency and build public trust.

## Focus Area 2: Principal Leadership

- *While most principals described positive, student-centered cultures at their schools, in addition to multiple program and curriculum initiatives, few principals articulated a specific instructional focus.*
- *During principal interviews, all principals expressed a willingness to accept constructive feedback provided by the Team and central office staff. Principals appeared to genuinely want to improve student achievement. School leaders at H.E. White and Big Otter elementary schools were utilizing instructional leadership practices within their schools and could assist central office staff in building institutional leadership capacity with other school leaders.*
- *When asked about school morale, teachers expressed an overall sense of positivity and optimism regarding the current school year. Fifty-two percent of teacher interview responses indicated employee morale was mostly positive. Forty-eight percent of teachers responded morale had been low in prior years, but they had observed improvements and positive changes this school year. All teachers interviewed expressed feeling supported in their role.*
- *Twenty percent of teachers stated principals included support and feedback on teaching and learning of the West Virginia College and Career Readiness Content Standards as part of the instructional support and feedback process. Five percent of teachers reported their principals conducted infrequent walkthroughs.*

- *When asked about how their principal supported instruction and provided feedback for improving instructional practices, 75% of teachers answered that principals conducted weekly walkthroughs and gave informal feedback only. It was evident most principals had basic practices in place regarding using walkthroughs for monitoring instruction. The Team determined these practices could be improved by deliberately focusing on specific high-yield strategies to address specific standards for students while monitoring for utilization of those strategies and standards.*
- *When asked what has led to the decline in student achievement in Clay County, principals had varied responses. However, some commonalities among the principals' opinions were observed. The most common reason cited by the principals was the COVID-19 National Emergency. The next most frequently mentioned reason given was a lack of instructional focus coming from the central office. Lastly, principals cited student achievement had been declining in Clay County due to staffing and personnel issues, such as teacher retirements, newly hired teachers, lack of certified teachers, and the need for more curriculum support positions at the schools.*

**FINDING 2.1:** While the team observed a focus on improving attendance in schools, most school leaders did not articulate specific instructional focus areas for their schools. Additionally, most teachers interviewed did not discuss the goals or action steps within the strategic plan for their school.

**RECOMMENDATION 2.1:** Collaborate with the WVDE Office of Leadership Support to enhance instructional leadership capabilities by assisting principals and School Leadership Teams to develop school-level strategic plans which include prioritized instructional needs for their schools. Additionally, guide principals in developing classroom walk-through criteria aligned to the specific needs of their respective schools. Apprise staff of the progress toward goal completion regularly and adjust focus areas as goals are met.

**NONCOMPLIANCE 2.1:** The team did not observe standards-based instruction in most classrooms. Furthermore, when asked about instructional focus areas for their schools, school leaders did not discuss the West Virginia College and Career Readiness Standards (WVCCRS) but instead referenced supplemental curricula and programs. *WVBE Policy 2510, Section 2.4*

**CORRECTIVE ACTION 2.1:** Collaborate with the WVDE Office of Teaching and Learning to provide professional development designed to increase teacher and principal knowledge of the WVCCRS. Ensure an understanding of the vertical design of the standards in addition to the content and actionable requirement of individual standards. The principal and School Leadership Team also create a process to monitor the implementation of standards-based instruction.

**FINDING 2.2:** While the Team observed strong instructional leadership within individual schools, providing feedback designed to support instructional improvement was not evident as a district-wide practice.

**RECOMMENDATION 2.2:** Create a principal leadership professional learning community (PLC) to provide principals opportunities to collaborate and build district-wide leadership capacity. Task stronger instructional leaders with guiding the development and expansion of this work.

# Focus Area 3: School Improvement Processes and Instruction

## School-Specific Observations

### ***Big Otter Elementary***

Highlights: During interviews, the team determined student academic success was a focus area for the school. Classroom walkthroughs are conducted frequently with supportive feedback given to teachers. Additionally, it was evident the school has strong instructional leadership from the administration and the school leadership team. Evidence of this includes frequent meetings to discuss the school's strategic plan, vertical data analysis, planning for student interventions, and utilizing the SAT process for student success.

Suggested Focus Areas: Collaborate with the central office to design professional learning aligned to high-level student engagement and research-based instructional design.

### ***Clay Elementary***

Highlights: The team noted a strong sense of community among the staff. Teacher interview responses stated the staff was close-knit and very supportive of one another. Additionally, staff stated communication between school administration and teachers has improved greatly this year. One teacher discussed, in detail, the intervention process she used in her classroom. This could serve as a model for the rest of the school and other schools in the county.

Suggested Focus Areas: Request professional development from the central office in the West Virginia College and Career Readiness Standards (WVCCRS). In addition, prioritize a focus on standards-based instruction and high-yield instructional strategies during classroom walkthroughs.

### ***Clay High School***

Highlights: During interviews, teachers stated there was a noticeable improvement in morale among the staff. There is a school-wide focus on attendance, leading to a five-percent improvement in student attendance. Most teachers stated they believed the school was beginning to head in the right direction.

Suggested Focus Areas: With support from the central office, create a clear process for the flow of communication between staff, the School Leadership Team, Professional Learning Communities, and school administration. Develop protocols for reciprocal communication between all staff and members of the School Leadership Team. Include representation from all content areas on the School Leadership Team and make certain all have input in decision making that impacts the entire school. Ensure instructional delivery is aligned with WVCCRS, utilizing the WVDE Office of Teaching and Learning to provide technical assistance as necessary.

### ***Clay Middle School***

Highlights: Student and staff morale were described as generally positive during interviews. All teachers feel supported and encouraged in their roles. The principal has set clear expectations for bell-to-bell teaching and conducts classroom walkthroughs, providing constructive feedback to staff.

Suggested Focus Areas: The principal work with central office staff to conduct professional learning in delivery of the WVCCRS and high-yield instructional strategies for all teachers. Additionally, place focus on working to increase student engagement during instruction. Monitor instruction to ensure WVCCRS are being taught and high-yield strategies are being used.

### **H.E. White Elementary**

Highlights: During observations, the team noted strong teacher and student engagement. Writing instruction was being provided in many classrooms as this is a school-wide focus. During interviews, teachers described a positive school culture and strong leadership from the principal.

Suggested Focus Areas: A focus on increasing academic rigor and higher-order thinking activities would benefit students. Collaborate with central-office staff to schedule professional learning in this area.

### **Lizemore Elementary**

Highlights: The team noted a great effort being put forth by staff instructing students. Staff members were very professional, and it was evident they care about the students. During interviews, teachers described using data from iReady and formative assessments to plan for student interventions.

Suggested Focus Areas: Collaborate with central-office staff to identify and prioritize school-wide instructional focus areas. Adjust the instructional walk-through form to reflect identified focus areas. Utilize walk-through data to determine professional learning needs for all teachers and plan accordingly.

## **District-wide Observations**

- *There has been a county-wide focus on improving attendance. Attendance rates are calculated monthly for each school, with the top three schools receiving recognition. During interviews, principals and teachers discussed both school-wide and classroom attendance incentives. The team observed evidence of and data related to these incentives both in classrooms and in hallways.*
- *Throughout the visit, the Team experienced a cooperative and motivated culture regarding school improvement. Many interview respondents expressed their willingness to receive feedback and to adjust practices to best support student achievement in the county.*
- *Teacher responses varied concerning the root causes of the decline in student achievement over the past five years. Interview responses indicated teachers attribute this decline to a lack of central office instructional leaders, teacher turnover and a lack of certified candidates, the COVID-19 National Emergency, internet issues, and poverty.*
- *To gather information regarding the effectiveness of the district-wide instructional program, the Team conducted fifty-five classroom observations over four days. Classroom observations lasted a minimum of twenty minutes and included multiple subject areas and programmatic levels. Class sizes observed ranged from four students to twenty-eight students.*
- *The Pax social-emotional learning program, Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS), and attendance were mentioned as district initiatives. Observed evidence of these initiatives*



*consisted mainly of posters and anchor charts displayed in classrooms.*

- *Most classrooms were observed to be conducive to student learning. Observers noted students were compliant with teacher expectations in most classrooms. Seating arrangements varied between classrooms; with rows, pairs, and quads being the most prevalent configurations.*
- *Direct instruction, in which the teacher provided instruction, modeled, led a discussion, or questioned students, was the most common instructional practice observed. Students working with teacher assistance was noted as the second most common instructional practice. Higher-order learning tasks were observed during two lessons and collaborative academic conversations were observed during three lessons.*

**FINDING 3.1:** A lack of support for the instructional program in recent school years was evident to the Team. This was determined through multiple interview responses regarding minimal support for instruction from the central office and a downward trajectory in student academic achievement during recent years.

**RECOMMENDATION 3.1:** With assistance from the WVDE Office of Accountability, the county and school-level leadership identify and prioritize the instructional needs of their schools. Utilize data sources including, but not limited to student academic achievement, personnel evaluations, classroom walkthroughs, benchmark assessments, etc. to inform a comprehensive instructional focus district-wide.

**FINDING 3.2:** Rigorous curriculum delivery requiring problem-solving and higher-order thinking on behalf of students was not observed. Additionally, high-yield instructional strategies were not observed in most classrooms.

**RECOMMENDATION 3.2:** The WVDE Office of Teaching and Learning provides professional learning to address rigorous, grade-level curriculum delivery. Additional topics may include activities to promote higher-order thinking, distributed summarizing, collaborative pairs, vocabulary instruction, and writing across content areas. Central office staff monitor and provide additional implementation support regularly.

## Focus Area 4: Financial Indicators and Purchasing Procedures

- *As of January 2013, Clay County Schools had incurred a 2.2-million-dollar budget deficit and was placed on the WVDE financial watch list. The WVDE provided technical assistance to the treasurer and required monthly financial updates.*
- *When the current Chief School Business Officer (CSBO) was hired in 2018, the financial status of the county made significant progress in a short amount of time. Clay County was removed from the WVDE financial watch list in February 2019. Some practices contributing to this progress were: maximizing the use of purchasing cards, including for food services; correcting coding errors resulting in additional reimbursement from the state aid formula; utilizing the USDA commodities program; and receiving discounts on bills by paying them in a timelier manner.*

- *The Clay County Schools general fund balance has been on a continual incline for the last ten years. Conservative financial practices implemented by the current CSBO, and increased state aid fund flexibility are contributing factors to this trend. For the past two fiscal years, federal funding made available after the COVID-19 National Emergency has also contributed to the dramatic increase in this balance. (See Figure 3.)*
- *The loss of the excess levy which provided \$531,573 annually to fund expenses including maintenance, operation of school buildings and instructional supplies coupled with no longer receiving ESSER funding which has inflated the fund balance for the past two years, places the school system in a situation requiring close oversight of the finances to assure the county continues to maintain a healthy fund balance.*

**RECOMMENDATION 4.1:** Due to the failure of the excess school levy, conduct a comprehensive review of Clay County finances with a focus on student needs while being fiscally responsible. CSBO continue the effective conservative practices described above and continues to monitor the fund balance. The WVDE Office of School Finance is available to provide additional technical assistance as requested.

**RECOMMENDATION 4.2:** The district is currently funding sixteen positions with Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funding that is set to expire on September 30, 2024. These funded positions annually cost \$716,985.00. The Team recommended the district begin planning immediately to sustain these positions after the ESSER funding is liquidated or to address a Reduction in Force (RIF) within the required timeframes.

**RECOMMENDATION 4.3:** Avoid the practice of including regular expenses, such as utilities in future excess levy calls.

## Focus Area 5: Operation of Federal Programs

**RECOMMENDATION 5.1:** The county has an approved infrastructure project included in their American Relief Plan (ARP) ESSER budget that includes HVAC and window replacement at H.E. White Elementary. Since the county has discussed the possibility of closing H.E. White in the near future, the Team recommended the ARP ESSER budget be revised and that amount allocated to another permissible project if the local board decides to move forward with closure hearings.











David L. Roach  
West Virginia Superintendent of Schools